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ABSTRACT

Intended to be a culminating activity after seventh grade social studies students have studied India, this week-long lesson features autobiographical sketches of six teenagers from India. The lesson has three objectives: (1) to provide actual life stories of teenagers as a springboard for further research about the customs and culture of India; (2) to show that people everywhere take pride in their nation and will work to improve any weakness; and (3) to communicate research information with other class members. An 8-item bibliography is included. (DB)

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MEET INDIA'S URBAN TEENAGERS

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For Use with Seventh Grade Social Studies Classes

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Goals: MEET INDIA'S URBAN TEENAGERS is intended to be a culminating activity after students in seventh grade social studies have studied India. By using the autobiographical sketches of six teenagers from India, students should gain insight into the similarities of teenagers everywhere and into the cultural differences which make these representatives of India unique from the rest of the world.

Although I had originally planned to interview more teenagers from different socio-economic groups and from both rural and urban areas, I found myself limited by time, by access to these varying groups, and by language. However, I feel the six teenagers I did interview revealed much about their culture that is beneficial for my own students to study. Many of the questions I asked were ones written by my students before I went to India.

I planned this activity to use with my seventh grade social studies classes, but it should work in any secondary class.

Objectives:

1. To provide actual life stories of teenagers as a springboard for further research about the customs and culture of India.

2. To show that people everywhere take pride in their nation and will work to improve any weaknesses.

3. To communicate research information with other class members.

Lesson Plans/Procedures: Time: One Week

--At the end of the unit on India in the textbook, the teacher should break the class into six groups, giving each group one of the teenage autobiographies.

--After reading the biographical sketch, each group should formulate questions for further study (Examples: What is a Sikh? How are marriages arranged in India? What is a Parsi? How does the educational system work in India?)

--From the list each group will choose at least two questions to research. The teacher should make sure that there is not a duplication of questions so that students can use all resources and references applicable to their areas.

--Each school will obviously have different resources available. The materials I have listed are only suggestions and ones which I have available.

1. Various general encyclopedias
2. Almanacs
3. Newspaper clippings and magazine articles about current events in India
4. Various Indian movie and women's magazines
5. Travel guides and brochures
6. KNOW INDIA booklets published for the Festival of India, 1985-1986. (Printwell of Bombay)
7. Specific titles. See Bibliography at the end of this article.

--Students will spend two days researching their topics. They will then plan ways to present the information and autobiographical sketches to the class. Students should make sure that each person in the group has a job. Suggestions for presentations:

1. Dramatizations. One idea would be a family situation with the teenager asking questions of a parent and/or grandparent. Another idea would be a group of Indian and U.S. teenagers talking about their lives.

2. Mock interview with students posing questions to the teenager.

3. Visual and/or audio aids such as posters, charts, pictures and tapes to help tell a story or impart information.

4. Direct teaching of information with short follow-up activities for the class, such as a crossword puzzle or a short quiz.

Auxiliary Activities

If possible, have the English teacher work with students in formulating their own autobiographical sketches similar to those given in class. Student stories should reflect both the universal traits of teenagers and the cultural differences of life in the United States and in India.

Autobiographical Sketches: The six teenage stories are to be used in the small groups.

Teenager One

My name is Suhasini which means "one who smiles sweetly." I am 16 years old and attend the XII grade in a private school in New Delhi. I study commerce, accounting, mathematics, economics, and English.

In my family are my father Subramanian who is a member of Parliament and an economist; my mother who is an advocate of law; and one older sister. My mother is a Parsi and my father is Hindu. I am very passive about the subject. I do not believe in idol worship but pray to a god. I also do not believe in marriage unless the girl is allowed to choose the man she wants to marry.

Most Americans I know are surprised by how different India is from what they thought. They somehow had visualized my country with elephants and mud huts. This country has much more to offer. What I would like to change about India is economic. I would like to be able to set the country on its way to a free market. To help reach this goal, I would like to make my money in a career I choose by the time I am 40 and then go into public service, politics or administration.

At home we eat mainly Indian food, but there is Western food we also have. I love spaghetti and casseroles! In my spare time I like listening to soft music, especially Urdu music, and Haydn and Handel. I also know the temple dance of South India called Bharatnatyam.

Teenager Two

Let me introduce myself. I am Indermohan Singh, "Princey" to my friends and family. I received this nickname at birth. Everyone stood up when I was born!

My family has my dad, a marine engineer; my mother, a computer analyist; a sister; and myself, a sixteen-year-old boy. We live in the Swedish Embassy and have a woman who does our cooking, cleaning, and washing. We are Sikhs and worship a book called Guru Grant Sahib which is placed in a temple. Once a week, generally on Sunday, we go to the temple. Our prayers are said in the form of "shabads."

I attend Class XII in a private school in New Delhi. Our fees are Rs310 per month with bus service and Rs240 per month without. I am studying the sciences: physics, chemistry, mathematics, economics, computer science, and engineering.

On the weekends I go to movies or parties with my friends and spend some of my time studying. My hobbies are having fun with my computer and listening to my Heavy Metal tapes, including Bon Jovi, Metallica, and White Snake. Since I am non-vegetarian, I like to eat chicken, burgers, and pizza.

What do I see as the basic problem in India? It is the unemployment. My goal? My dream is to become rich, rich, rich!

Teenager Three

Hello. My name is Shantaru. I am a sixteen-year-old male from New Delhi. I attend the XI Standard in a private school.

My father is the Secretary of the Ministry of Steel and Mines, and my mother teaches Hindi in college. I also have two sisters. I am a Hindu.

In school I have commerce, accountancy, mathematics, English, economics, and computer science as my subjects. I like to play games like football, basketball, and chess.

The history of India is very rich. In Delhi there are old monuments, such as the Qutb Minar and the Iron Pillar. The country has two main epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. The two main heroes of these epics are Ram and Krishna.

Many Americans think that elephants roam around in the streets of India's cities and that tribals are everywhere. But it is not so. There are a lot of cars and busses and a lot of pollution.

Two people work at my house doing the dishes, washing clothes, cleaning, and cooking. We pay them and also provide accomodations.

I like to listen to pop music, but I also like Indian classical music. I am also interested in hard rock. I am a fan of Isaac Asimov who lives in Manhattan. I have read many of his books, including the Classic Foundation trilogy. I like to eat buttered chicken, nan (a kind of bread), and pizza.

I would like to join the National Defense Academy and serve my country.

Teenager Four

Hi! My name is Kamini. I'm thirteen and from Delhi, the capital of India. It is not part of a state but a union territory.

There are four people in my family. My father is a newspaper editor and my mother is a social anthropologist. My seventeen-year-old brother plans to attend medical school. We are not part of an extended family which often has cramped living conditions. The advantage of living in a joint family is that you're close to your relatives.

My school is co-educational, has about 1500 in kindergarten through XII, and is ranked the third best in India. Each grade is divided into three sections, A, B, and C. I am in Grade VIII-B. I love English and social studies and music and simply loathe math and science, not including biology. All of our classes are in English. I also know Hindi, our national language; Tamil, a regional language; and Sanskrit.

School for us is from April to May. From May to July we have our summer holiday. We then go to school from October to December, break until the middle of January, and have school until March. Then our year is over.

I love the outdoors, especially hiking. Every summer I go for a 12-day trek. I like swimming, skating, biking, running for my school, and playing basketball, baseball, and tennis. I love writing poetry and keeping a journal. I love meeting people and making new friends.

I have a very carefree life which is full of fun. I have lots of friends, and we generally freak out in Delhi, often at Nirula's, which is a chain of fast-food restaurants like McDonalds. We also go to Connaught Place, the main shopping centre for the whole of Delhi.

Teenager Four continued

I love listening to music and I adore Michael J. Fox and Kirk Cameron. Indian film stars are Amala, the cutie pie of the film industry; Aamer Khan, the hottest guy in Tinsel Town; and Chunky Pandey, the coolest guy in my opinion.

You must come to India. It's a beautiful country and I love it.

Teenager Five

My name is Shalina. I am a fifteen-year-old girl from Calcutta. In my home are my grandmother, my mother, and my older brother and sister. My mother is a teacher and has been a principal for a year and a half. Unfortunately, my parents are divorced. My father is a finance manager in the government and stationed in Orissa. I feel fortunate, however, that we are still a very close family. At home we speak both Bengali and English. Although we are Hindu, we only celebrate the special festivals.

I attend a private Catholic school which has a tuition of Rs 35 (about $2.10) a month. In Class IX I take English, mathematics, geography, Indian history, economics, physics, chemistry, biology and Bengali. My classes are all conducted in English, and there is very little discussion in the classes. There are about 40 students per classes with the boys and girls in separate sections. Math, English, and geography are my favorite subjects.

We have classes from 7:30 a.m. until 1:20 p.m. Then we sometimes go swimming. In the evenings I change into my jeans, do my homework and read.

I have had opportunities to see my country. Twice I have visited Bombay, have taken the plane to visit relatives in Delhi, and have even ridden an elephant in Rajasthan. Our school has non-compulsory excursions, one to Nepal. Someday I would like to see Switzerland, the Soviet Union, and the United States, especially Washington, D.C.

Like most of my friends, I like to listen to Madonna and Tiffany and Hassan Shangir, the Pakistani who sings "Howa Howa." Magazines I enjoy are Jet Set, Sun, and Seventeen. I read teen romances such as the Sweet Valley High series which I borrow from friends or the library. We can also rent videos in Hindi and English for Rs 10 a movie.

Teenager Five continued

Most parents are strict about their children dating. Sometimes they seem overprotective. We do meet boys at the homes of our friends and through our brothers. For me, I want a later marriage and one child. I plan to enter a business management field.

I am a strong believer in women's rights. I am against bride burning, arranged marriages, and the dowry system. In Calcutta we also have to solve the problems of inadequate garbage collection and poor streets.

India does not have a social security system, but Indians and employers pay ten percent into the Provident Fund. At the end of his or her career, the worker gets back what was paid in plus the interest. Indians also pay a corporate city tax, a wealth tax, and an income tax which is due March 31. Indians also have to be 18 in order to drive.

We are fortunate in Calcutta not to have many drug and alcohol problems. While you are here, you must visit Victoria Memorial and our wonderful museums.

Teenager Six

I am Poonam. I live in Delhi now but have traveled throughout much of India because my father serves in the Air Force. Also in my family are my mother and an older brother who is studying medicine.

I am in Class X at the Air Force school in Delhi, one of the few co-educational schools in the city. I am proud of our school, especially the fine arts building. The school hires master artists to teach us in the areas of sculpture, painting, batik, dance, singing, and music. Before we enter the music rooms, we must remove our shoes since music is sacred, having originated in the temples. My favorite class is my chorus class. We sing classical Indian songs, and our teacher accompanies us on the harmonium.

We show great respect for our teachers, and the students are quite well disciplined. I think students in the United States have too much freedom. The expectation level in India's schools is much higher than in the U.S. Whenever a guest or an adult enters our school room, we stand as a class and greet the person with "Namaste." In the presence of our teachers, we always remain standing until we are asked to be seated.

Our school day is from 7:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. At 8 a.m. we have a fifteen-minute assembly in which we sing the national anthem, hear announcements, and meet guests. We have a canteen, but we eat lunch at home after school. For an allowance I receive Rs 50 (about $3) a month. Some of this money I donate at school each Friday to help sponsor a needy village near Delhi. Most of the private schools take up similar collections.

My parents are my friends. They both help me with decisions about my future. My mother doesn't work, but she wants me to be on my own with training for a job and not be like her. My father does not believe in going

to a restaurant for dinner since eating at home is more nutritious, better tasting, and less expensive. After they retire, I hope I am able to give my parents comfort.

My friends and I like to listen to both Indian and American rock music, and we love getting together to sing the lyrics. After exams, we sometimes go out as a co-ed group to someplace like Nirula's, a fast food restaurant. Unless we are in a large group, we do not feel it is safe to go to the movies. Instead, we rent videos. My parents limit my television viewing to one hour a night, but I rarely watch Indian television.

I would like you to be in India on August 15, our Independence Day marking when we were free from British rule. There is also an Annual Day at the area schools in which progress is shown in all of the fields. Schools are rated on this day.

If you asked me what my favorite Indian food is, I would have to say "idli dosa," a rice dish from Southern India.

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